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AUTHOR Kane, Dennis; And Others

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ABSTRACT

This report presents results of Year 1 of a 2-year Vermont study of the extent to which the goals of State Act 230 (which requires schools to develop a comprehensive system of education services including an instructional support system for students with special needs) have been realized. The study includes an assessment of the degree to which 220 individual students have been successfully supported; a statewide survey of all special education administrators (57 responses) regarding implementation of Act 230; and a qualitative study of two elementary schools effectively implementing Act 230. Key findings are presented in a question and answer format for the following topics: outcomes for prior special education students; outcomes for current special education students; outcomes for students who had been served through instructional support teams; integration of special education and other support services; personnel delivering special education and support services; characteristics of students receiving support services; changes in curriculum and instruction; effects of instructional support teams on schools; effects of professional development activities; and funding issues. A chart contrasts effective and ineffective ways to implement Act 230. A final section identifies four challenges which address the needs for: (1) adequate, predictable funding; (2) professional development; (3) meeting the needs of students with challenging behavior; and (4) forging connections to the community. (DB)

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ED 381 957

Act 230 in Vermont

What's Happening:

- Students
- Classrooms
- Schools

March 1995

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Act 230 in Vermont

RESEARCH TEAM:

Vermont State Department of Education

Dennis Kane, Project Director
Patricia Johnson, Project Co-Coordinator

The University Affiliated Program of Vermont
University of Vermont

Susan Alnasrawi, Project Co-Coordinator
Wayne Fox
Katharine S. Furney
Susan Hasazi
Herman W. Meyers

Barre City Supervisory Union

Kristin Reedy

Lamoille South Supervisory Union

Jean Cotroneo

Report Design and Layout by Michaella Collins

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What's Happened to Students?	4
What's Happened to Classrooms?	8
What's Happened to Schools as a Whole?	12
You *Can* Get There From Here!	18
☛ What Works, What Doesn't	
What's Ahead: Challenges and Future Directions	22
Additional Resources	27

Introduction

CONTEXT

Change is underway in most Vermont schools. Students have more diverse needs than ever before, and schools are exploring a variety of ways to meet their needs. Act 230, state legislation which was passed in 1990, is connected to many of these changes because it articulates the ways in which schools need to address the diverse needs and promote the success of all students.

Prior to Act 230, the generally accepted way to meet the diverse needs of students was to develop special programs and services that were delivered to students outside of the general education classroom. Most often, the special education system was the source of these programs and services. Over time, more and more children were made eligible for special education, yet those who required some support but did not qualify for special education were often left without access to the help they needed to succeed.

In the late 1980s, two commissions on special education were formed to look for ways to deal with the increasing costs and somewhat rigid structure of special education. Their work resulted in the passage of Act 235 in 1988 and Act 230 in 1990. Act 235 radically changed the way special education was fundèd. It allowed schools to develop more flexible funding systems and established a state and local partnership for all special education expenditures. Act 230 made additional changes in the funding structure and required schools to develop a comprehensive system of educational services, including an instructional support system to provide services to those students in need of classroom support. It was designed to encourage early identification of students at risk for school failure and to increase the capacity of general education to support all students.

During the 1992-93 school year, the Vermont Department of Education conducted an initial study of Act 230 by collecting data on the extent to which students who had exited special education in 34 schools had been successful. A report of the study's findings was disseminated in December 1993.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

In 1993, the Vermont Department of Education, in conjunction with the University of Vermont, received a two year federal grant to explore the extent to which the goals of Act 230 have been realized for students and schools. The current study expanded upon the scope of the first, and consists of three sub-studies:

A quantitative study of the degree to which individual students have been successfully supported by their school's system of support;

A statewide survey of all special education administrators, regarding their beliefs about the results of the implementation of Act 230; and

A qualitative study of schools in which the goals of Act 230 appear to have been successfully met on a systemic level.

During the 1993-94 school year (Year 1 of the federal grant), activities related to the quantitative study resulted in visits to 23 schools in four districts in Vermont. A total of 220 students were randomly selected from each of three categories: 1) students currently receiving special education services through an Individualized Educational Program (IEP); 2) students who had exited the special education system within the past two years; and 3) students who had received support through the school's Instructional Support Team (IST) over the past year. A total of 1200 interviews were conducted with these students and their parents, and classroom and special education teachers. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the degree to which individual students were considered to be successful in school. The interviewees were encouraged to reflect on their own definitions of success, which included discussions of academic, behavioral and social issues. In addition to their perceptions of success, data were obtained on student's grades and the results of their responses on the Quality of School Life Scale (QSL). The QSL is a standardized survey designed to measure student satisfaction with teachers, curriculum, and the general school climate. Finally, additional interviews with teachers and administrators yielded information on systemic issues related to Act 230.

The survey of special education administrators was also conducted during Year I. Fifty-seven of the state's 60 special education administrators (95%) responded to a mailed survey in which they were asked to comment on the degree to which they agreed with affirmative statements about local implementation of Act 230. Survey items addressed issues such as trends in child count data, procedures for identifying and placing students eligible for special education services, and perceptions of the goals of Act 230 and its effects on the roles of special education administrators.

Finally, the Year I activities related to the qualitative component of the study resulted in case studies of two elementary schools. The schools were selected by members of a nomination committee who were asked to identify schools that were leaders in the state in their efforts to implement Act 230 and related school reform initiatives. At each site, approximately 40 interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, support staff members, parents, students, school board members and community service providers. The purpose of the interviews was to describe effective strategies, service delivery approaches and structures used in individual classrooms and the school as a whole to support all students. In addition, the interviewees described factors that had appeared to facilitate change in this direction, their school's greatest strengths and challenges related to Act 230, and directions for the future.

GUIDELINES FOR READING THE REPORT

The report which follows attempts to synthesize the data collected through the three sub-studies. A question and answer format is used to outline key findings of the study. Specific data and information supporting each finding are listed below it. Supporting items are marked by one or more of the following symbols, which indicate the sub-study which serves as the data source for that information:

Quantitative study

Survey of special education administrators

Case studies of exemplary schools

The study's results are organized into five major categories, including findings related to the success of individual students included in the study, recent changes in classrooms, recent changes in schools and school-wide support systems, factors which seem to promote or inhibit successful implementation of Act 230, and the challenges ahead as Vermonters work towards realizing the goal of meeting the needs of all students. The findings may or may not represent the status of Act 230 at your particular school or supervisory union; however, we believe they provide important information that may be used by school personnel and community members as they reflect on and discuss issues related to the current and future status of Act 230. Feedback and questions regarding the report should be directed to:

Vermont Act 230 Study
Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620

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What's Happened to Students?

A major part of this study looked at 220 students that fell into one of three categories: students who had previously been eligible for special education services, but who were no longer receiving services; students on IEPs; and students who had been referred to Instructional Support Teams (ISTs). The following questions and answers highlight findings for each of the three categories of students. In addition, some data on student success and service delivery was obtained through the results of the special education administrators' survey.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO STUDENTS WHO WERE RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND ARE NO LONGER ON IEPS?

In general, students who exited special education were identified as "successful" by classroom teachers, special educators, parents, and the students themselves.

- 82% of the students who came off of IEPs were rated as successful by their special education and classroom teachers.
- 98% of the teachers interviewed felt full-time placement in the general education classroom was appropriate for these students.
- 79% of the students who came off of IEPs were rated as successful by their parents in classroom performance, behavior in school, behavior in the classroom, friendships, and participation in after-school activities.
- 96% of these students reported that they liked school.
- 89% of these students reported that they felt successful in school.
- Grades indicated that these students' academic performance was the same when they came off of IEPs as it had been when they were on IEPs.

Many of the students who exited special education continue to need support, and they receive this support in a variety of ways.

91.2% of special education directors agreed that "the educational needs of children no longer on IEPs are being met outside of special education."

The support needs of students who exited special education were primarily in academic areas, such as language, reading, writing and mathematics.

84% of the students who came off of IEPs had previously been identified as either learning disabled or speech and language impaired.

Only 2% of the sample of students who came off of IEPs had been previously identified as having an emotional/behavioral disability.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO STUDENTS WHO ARE STILL RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES?

In general, students who were on IEPs at the time of the study were identified as "successful" by classroom teachers, special educators, parents, and the students themselves.

79% of the students who were on IEPs were rated as successful by their special education and classroom teachers.

86% of the parents of students on IEPs rated their children as successful.

86% of these students reported that they liked school.

97% of these students reported that they felt successful in school.

Of the three groups of students followed, students on IEPs received the highest percentage of A's on their report cards.

Most students on IEPs receive support services in general education classrooms.

- 98.2% of special education administrators agreed that support services were being provided in general education classrooms.
- 80% of special education administrators reported that classroom teachers believed that students on IEPs should receive services in general education settings.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO STUDENTS WHO WERE SERVED THROUGH INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TEAMS (ISTS)?

Some of the students who were served through ISTs were identified as "successful" by classroom teachers, special educators, parents, and the students themselves.

- 65% of the students referred to ISTs were rated as successful by teachers after an IST intervention.
- Parents identified 63% of the students referred to ISTs as successful following an IST intervention.
- 80% of these students reported that they liked school.
- 79% of these students reported that they felt successful in school.

The support needs of students served through ISTs were varied.

- Nearly all of the students were referred for more than one reason.
- In most cases, students referred to the IST were referred for social or behavioral issues in addition to academic issues.

CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENTS

Compared to the other two groups of students in the study, students being served through ISTs are the least successful overall.

Some classroom teachers reported that the IST does not provide adequate support to these students.

35% of the students referred to ISTs were *not* rated as successful by their teachers even after an IST intervention.

Most students referred to ISTs were reported to have social and behavioral challenges; however, many teachers felt that ISTs were less successful in dealing with these issues than academic issues.

Of the three categories of students studied, students who had been referred to the IST had the lowest grades.

We need to know more about why students with and without disabilities are dropping out of high school.

To date, the study has not gathered information on students who have dropped out of school. The following data, however, suggests that many high school students in Vermont are not successful:

- *Total percent of high school students leaving school prior to graduation = 17%.*
- *Percent of high school students with disabilities leaving high school prior to graduation = 35%.*

What's Happened to Classrooms?

Data on student success were closely related to data on recent changes in classrooms across Vermont. These changes generally fell into one of two categories: 1) delivery of special education and other support services; including who is delivering and who is receiving services; and 2) curriculum and instruction. Descriptions of classrooms were obtained through all three of the study's data sources.

HOW ARE SPECIAL EDUCATION AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES BEING DELIVERED?

Special education and other support services are being delivered in more integrated, coordinated and inclusionary ways.

- 100% of special education administrators agreed that students spend a majority of their day in the regular classroom.
- 98% of special education administrators agreed that special education services are delivered in general classroom settings. There has been a great reduction in the use of "pull out" models.
- Changes in classroom organization (e.g., multi-age classrooms, team teaching, grouping for instruction) appear to facilitate delivery of support services to students with a broad range of needs.

> *"I think that one of the utmost benefits...is that children learn from each other... The strongest students you have learn things from the students that are the most challenged. As adults we learn that too...The kids are becoming more tolerant of other kids and more accepting. As we look at issues of diversity, inclusion goes right along with that."*
>
> –Teacher

WHO IS DELIVERING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES?

More teachers and support services staff are available to work with all students in the classroom.

Many schools use a team approach consisting of classroom teachers, consulting teachers, paraeducators, parents, and others to support students with diverse needs in the classroom.

There is less identification of "special education kids" with "special education staff."

Students receive support services from paraeducators, classroom teachers, and consulting teachers.

98% of special education administrators agreed that special education staff are assuming responsibility for children not on IEPs.

84% of special education administrators agreed that classroom teachers show an increased acceptance of responsibility for all children.

89% of special education administrators agreed that regular education teachers have increased their abilities to address the diverse needs of students.

Paraeducators appear to be critical to service delivery. They provide services to all students, regardless of whether or not they are on IEPs, and enable teachers to direct their attention to the diverse needs of students.

> *"Serving a child with severe disabilities in the classroom takes a lot of work and it takes a whole team. You need a whole team of people that can work well together to pull it off. But I just see an amazing difference, and it's not just for the kids with disabilities. It's the whole realm of kids."*
>
> –Parent

WHO'S RECEIVING SUPPORT SERVICES?

***All* kinds of students are receiving support services— students who are eligible for special education, 504 or Chapter I services or accommodations, students who are considered gifted, and students without any label at all. Students who need help are receiving support in their classrooms without having to go through formal eligibility processes.**

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- 97% of special education administrators agreed that more children than ever are receiving support services outside of the special education system.
- 88% of special education administrators agreed that students who were never on IEPs are receiving adequate classroom support without being identified as eligible for special education services.
- Students who may be considered gifted are also considered to be "at-risk." Some are receiving support in the classroom, while others have additional needs that are not being met.

> *"I think what, philosophically, Act 230 did was to say that we would support all children in our school, and the non categorical model furthers that."*
>
> –Administrator

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION IN TODAY'S CLASSROOM?

In the classrooms where things seem to be working well, a variety of instructional techniques and curricular options are used to meet the needs of all learners.

- Many teachers described their curriculum as being more "hands-on," more project-oriented, and more student-centered. Students move around the classroom and are actively engaged in learning.
- Some teachers described their primary role as that of facilitator.

> *"I think one of the biggest changes...is the fact that we're much more student centered and project oriented. Before it was the more traditional classroom approach of dispensing information and retrieving it back. Now we're attempting to get into more interpretation and having kids work with the information through projects...Instead of being more teacher centered, there are cooperative groups, collaboration, class meetings, an attempt to begin collaborative decision making."*
>
> –Teacher

"If there are people in a classroom they're engaged with kids. Kids are usually engaged with each other. Teachers are usually up and walking around and active as opposed to sitting at their desks or sitting at the front of the room. A group of kids in a classroom doesn't necessarily belong to that teacher. There may be a combination of kids from a lot of different classrooms...There seems to be more movement, more alternatives, more student work posted."

–Support Services Administrator

CONCERNS ABOUT CLASSROOMS

Financial and human resources are in short supply, but teachers report that they cannot do with any less than they now have.

Classroom teachers believe that it is critical to have extra qualified adults in classrooms to support the needs of all students, yet many of the people interviewed in this study are concerned that limited and/or shrinking financial resources (e.g., federal, state and local) may result in cuts in personnel.

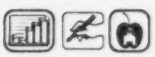
It requires extra team planning time to support children with diverse needs in the classroom. Classroom teachers, consulting teachers and paraeducators are concerned that the existing school schedule does not allow them enough planning time.

Increased training is needed to help teachers deal with the increasing number of students with challenging behaviors.

Teachers and administrators report the need for increased opportunities to participate in training about ways to deal with challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Teachers need to make changes in curriculum and instruction to meet the diverse needs of students.

In some schools, there is a concern that the presence of paraeducators in the general education classroom may allow some teachers to continue to teach as they always have, without making the real changes they need to make to support the needs of all students.



Teachers need to devote time to changing and modifying their curriculum and instruction. This effort, too, requires financial and human resources which may be in short supply.

What's Happened to Schools as a Whole?

Along with changes in classrooms, schools in Vermont have changed in recent years to meet the diverse needs of their students. Schools that have been successful in implementing Act 230 are described as having a commitment— often stated in a formal mission statement— to meeting the needs of all students. In addition, they have changed the structure and focus of their schools to ensure that the following elements are in place: 1) collaboration among school staff; 2) use of Instructional Support Teams; 3) professional development activities; and 4) flexible funding mechanisms. Again, all three parts of the study yielded information and descriptions of what has been happening in recent years in Vermont's schools, as well as what still needs to happen.

Teachers and support staff are spending more time and working together in a variety of ways.

- Teachers collaborate with one another on a variety of teams, including grade level team meetings, IEP teams, 504 teams, ISTs, and "house" team meetings. They also share concerns and information on a more informal basis.
- Teachers use their time together to engage in problem-solving around academic and behavioral issues.
- Teachers are no longer alone in their classrooms. Support services personnel, other classroom teachers, and paraeducators share in the instruction of all children in the class.
- In schools where shared leadership and decision making are practiced, teachers work together on systems level teams.

> *"What we've learned is that its very difficult for us to support the children that we now have in individualized instructional classroom settings without collaboration ...I would say collaboration is the key."*
>
> Administrator

> *"Just about every fiber of the system or the decision making strand— from placement to the lunch protocol to which door the kids come in from recess—the teachers are part of those decisions. It holds everybody accountable."*
>
> Teacher

HOW HAS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TEAMS (ISTS) AFFECTED SCHOOLS?

ISTs have influenced the delivery of support services in the classroom.

- 93% of special education administrators agreed that ISTs have had a positive impact on service delivery in the classroom.
- 88% of special education administrators agreed that ISTs have helped children to succeed in the regular classroom.

ISTs have influenced special education processes.

- 81% of special education administrators agreed that ISTs have provided a viable alternative to special education for some children.
- A majority of special educators believed that the IST process allowed students to receive the support they needed more quickly and through a greater variety of delivery options.

> *"Act 230...allows you to pick up students that normally wouldn't be labeled as IEP students, and be able to access services that normally somebody would say, 'Oh you can't, because he hasn't been tested and he's not on an IEP.'"*
>
> Teacher

ISTs have influenced teacher attitudes and practices.

- 88% of special education administrators agreed that ISTs have helped increase the ability of classroom teachers to address diversity.
- 93% of special education administrators agreed that ISTs have helped to reduce the isolation of classroom teachers.
- Both classroom teachers and special educators reported that the IST process helped to increase the degree to which they collaborate with one another, and that increased collaboration often led to better results for students.
- Many teachers reported that the IST process helped them appreciate and utilize the experience and expertise of their colleagues.

"When we'd exhausted all the possibilities and areas of consultation and things still didn't seem to be effective in planning for a child...then that was a great team to go to, just to say 'we tried this, we tried this, we need a fresh perspective'...and a lot of times its around enrichment and acceleration— just a kid who's incredibly gifted and we don't know where to turn to next...If you go and use the IST in that way, you would get the kind of expertise you needed."

Teacher

ISTs that function well are characterized by having a clear role in the school, a clear mission statement and operating procedures, opportunities for training, and connections to community resources.

ISTs may vary in size or organizational features (e.g., a school may have one IST for all students and teachers, or several ISTs that serve different grade levels) but ISTs that work are valued by the school community and are clear about how and why they operate.

HOW HAVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES AFFECTED THE CAPABILITY OF SCHOOLS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS?

Teachers and principals believe that opportunities for professional development have helped contribute to positive attitudes about meeting the needs of all students.

88% of special education administrators believed that training has helped to increase classroom teachers' sense of responsibility for the education of all students.

Teachers in schools where the process of change was embraced reported that training opportunities helped them to develop a positive attitude towards the need for and process of change. Some identified this as a "willingness to take risks" that was bolstered by the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

Teachers and principals identified professional development and training activities as critical to improving their ability to serve all students, including the average student, the gifted, and those with learning difficulties.

Most classroom teachers and special educators reported that training helped them to develop and improve their curriculum and instruction, as well as deal with challenging behaviors in the classroom.

89% of special education administrators agreed that training had helped to increase the ability of classroom teachers to address the diverse needs of students.

In schools where training activities seemed most effective, the school provided formal and informal opportunities for teachers to share newly acquired knowledge and skills. In addition, these schools focused on training opportunities that were consistent with their school's mission and overall goals.

Teachers and administrators believed that training activities were critical to the success of ISTs.

IST members and other teachers and administrators believed that it was critical for ISTs to be trained in skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, conflict resolution, and a range of instructional and curricular approaches to meeting the diverse needs of students, especially those with challenging behaviors.

> *"Everybody is involved with good stuff— and they bring it back to share."*
>
> Teacher

> *"People really work in a self-initiated way to avail themselves of learning— new learning, new opportunities— and it's not done in a singular fashion. Because of the collaborative model, there's a real desire to want to pull in as many people as you have with a team approach to things, which historically has effected the most change here."*
>
> Teacher

HOW HAVE FUNDING ISSUES BEEN ADDRESSED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS?

It still costs money to meet the needs of all students. Schools use a variety of strategies to maximize their resources.

Schools are taking advantage of the increased flexibility in state special education funding which was made possible by Act 230. This includes the blending of resources in order to provide non categorical services.

84% of special education administrators agreed that special education resources were being used to support students who were not on IEPs.

Schools which are committed to the process of change actively pursue external funds and resources.

A number of schools identified the importance of gaining support for local budgets and improvement efforts through forging strong connections with parents, school board members and the community-at-large.

> *"Our principal is the consummate grant writer. We do experience a lot of what we do because of the grant writing that goes on in the school. And she's been a real trainer of teachers in doing that, so that teachers feel real empowered to write grants to develop the kinds of programs and develop the resources they need."*
>
> Teacher

CONCERNS ABOUT SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN SCHOOLS:

ISTs are not functioning smoothly in all schools.

In some schools, ISTs are not perceived as having a clear role in the overall system of supports.

Unless ISTs have a mission statement, clear operating procedures, and mechanisms for follow-up on plans developed for teachers and students, IST success is difficult to achieve.

ISTs need to have the power to make changes and implement plans for teachers and students. This power requires administrative support.

Too frequently, ISTs are perceived as a place to "fix kids." Successful ISTs know that their role is to encourage teachers, on an ongoing basis, to learn new ways to feel successful with all students.

Some ISTs are viewed as "just another hoop" to jump through prior to a special education referral.

ISTs do not appear to function as well in high schools as in elementary schools.

Some ISTs are not able to make connections with necessary resources, both inside and outside of the school.

Some teachers and administrators believed that their ISTs were not able to offer students the level of support or resources that they needed in the school.

Some teachers and administrators believed that it was difficult for the IST to make the connections with outside agencies that might be needed by some students and their families.

Training opportunities are in danger of being limited by a lack of financial resources.

IST members need specific skills to ensure a smooth team functioning, including skills in collaboration, conflict resolution, creative problem-solving, and the development and evaluation of individual and classroom strategies and interventions. Teachers and administrators, however, are concerned about the fact that Act 230 training funds may be reduced or eliminated.

Adequate resources are essential to the continued success of systems of support.

In recent years, state support for both general and special education has declined, placing an unduly heavy burden on local budgets.

Schools are concerned that shrinking financial resources will result in personnel cuts and a reduced ability to support students with diverse needs in general classrooms.

Along with financial resources, teachers need time to plan and coordinate with others. A lack of planning time threatens to undo the progress that has been made.

If support is not provided for students outside of special education, parents and schools will most likely return to the practice of referring them to special education. This would result in a step backwards, with large numbers of resources being devoted to unnecessary paperwork, meetings and evaluations.

You *Can* Get There From Here! What Works, What Doesn't

Throughout the study, certain recurring themes emerged that, when viewed as a whole, provide an insight into what it takes to help all students succeed. While very few schools described their systems as having 100% of these factors currently in place, Act 230 seemed to work when a "critical mass" of them was present. Likewise, teachers and administrators in schools where it was perceived that Act 230 had not been fully implemented realized that they lacked many of these factors in their systems.

In the list that follows, the critical mass factors related to the success of Act 230 are listed in the left hand column. The right hand column describes characteristics of places which have not yet embraced all of the tenets of Act 230. The lists may be used to assess the degree to which schools have approached the critical mass of necessary ingredients. Missing pieces might be used to set goals that will enhance the abilities of schools to meet the needs of all students.

ACT 230 MAY WORK IF:	ACT 230 IS PROBABLY NOT WORKING IF:
Values and beliefs are clearly expressed and support the goals of Act 230.	**There is no clear statement of values**
• The school has a mission statement that articulates the goal of meeting the needs of all students. • There is an ethic of caring and mutual respect for all school and community members. • There is a belief in collaborative approaches to teaching, solving problems, and learning. • Students' needs guide decision-making.	• The school is a collection of individual philosophies. • Some school and community members appear to be more valued than others. • Teachers prefer to work on their own. • Programmatic and administrative concerns frequently override individual student needs.

ACT 230 MAY WORK IF:	ACT 230 IS PROBABLY NOT WORKING IF:
The classroom and school climate is positive.	**The classroom and school climate is stifling, chaotic or negative.**
• Classrooms are student-centered. • The curriculum is responsive to student, school and community needs. • Classes and/or student/staff ratios are small. • In-class supports are available to those who need it. • Approaches to discipline and conflict resolution are proactive and positive. • Teachers exhibit energy, determination, and professionalism. • Parents and community members are welcomed and involved.	• In the classroom, the teacher is the only one standing, talking and moving around. • The content or delivery of the school curriculum has not changed much in recent years. • Students rarely have a say in what is being taught. • Paraeducators are doing most of the individualizing for students. • To most teachers, discipline means punishment. • Teachers usually deal with discipline in their own ways. • Walking down the hallway is *not* a positive experience.
Leadership is shared among members of the school community.	**School administrators make all of the decisions.**
• School leaders have a vision. • School leaders are knowledgeable, creative, energetic and supportive. • Teachers and administrators are clear about who is responsible for what decisions. • Decision-making structures are in place, accessible, and active. • All members of the school community are viewed as potential leaders.	• Teachers and administrators have an "us and them" type of relationship. • School leaders appear to be ambivalent about or not supportive of Act 230. • Decision-making bodies such as the IST do not feel like they have any real power.

ACT 230 MAY WORK IF:	ACT 230 IS PROBABLY NOT WORKING IF:
Capacity building is viewed as a critical component of the change process. • Teachers have multiple opportunities for staff development. • Teachers and administrators believe it is important to share new knowledge. • Capacity building efforts are based on teachers' identified needs, and are linked to one another.	**Professional development activities are not connected to any particular direction for change.** • Teachers are not aware of what others are learning. • Inservice training has more to do with who is available to speak than what teachers want to learn.
Resources are used flexibly and creatively. • Available funds are commingled to provide non categorical services. • Teachers and administrators are willing to apply for external funds to support change efforts. • Teachers and administrators work to gain community support for local budgets.	**Teachers and administrators believe that change efforts are severely hampered by a lack of resources.** • Administrators rarely feel that the funds available to them are adequate, flexible, or predictable. • The school has never written a grant proposal. • Community members rarely support local budgets.

ACT 230 MAY WORK IF:	ACT 230 IS PROBABLY NOT WORKING IF:
Teachers and administrators demonstrate a commitment to change. • Change is viewed as positive, though not always easy. • Teachers and administrators are willing to take risks. • There is an atmosphere of trust around change efforts. • Time and energy are devoted to planning together, implementing new strategies, and reflecting on the change process. • School change efforts are connected to community and state level change efforts.	**The challenges associated with the change process are believed to outweigh its benefits.** • The most frequent response to new suggestions is "yes, but...." • Administrators rarely say "Go ahead and try this. If it doesn't work, we'll try something else." • Change efforts that *are* attempted are frequently conducted in isolation of other teachers and community members.
The school has established strong connections to its community. • Teachers and administrators have formed partnerships with parents, school board members, and the community-at-large. • Providers from local community agencies collaborate with school staff to develop and carry out programs for individual students. • The community is seen as a curriculum resource and used as a setting for instruction.	**The school and community are viewed as separate entities.** • Parents are rarely involved in substantive decisions about their children or the school. • Schools and community agencies work in isolation of one another on individual student issues and programs. • Teachers rarely extend their curriculum beyond the four walls of the school. • Change initiatives are pursued separately by schools and communities.

What's Ahead: Challenges and Future Directions

ENDANGERED SUCCESS

Vermont's schools have much to be proud of in their achievements related to Act 230 and the general goal of meeting the needs of all students. Still, our success to date might be characterized as an "endangered success." There are many challenges ahead of us. The maintenance of the gains made under Act 230 is severely threatened, for example, by reductions in state and federal support and the challenge of providing for students with emotional and behavioral problems. It will make little sense for schools to adopt new strategies if, once success is proven, new approaches and services are not supported. Additionally, not every school has made the same progress with regard to Act 230. Many schools, and especially our high schools, are still working to effect these changes. In order to ensure continued progress, there are things we must do. The list that follows represents the concerns most frequently voiced by those who participated in the three parts of the study, and their suggestions for future directions.

CHALLENGE # 1: ENSURE ADEQUATE, PREDICTABLE, FLEXIBLE FUNDING

Concerns: The potential to lose financial and human resources poses challenges to school systems throughout Vermont. Some implications of these concerns follow:

1. School districts worry that their communities, which have been supportive to date in terms of financial resources, are being stretched because of decreases in the state's special education funding formula. Future state aid cuts have the potential to result in the failure to support funding for ever-increasing local budgets.

2. There is a concern that shrinking resources might lead to cuts in the numbers of teachers and support staff available to help all students succeed in school.

3. A lack of support for students not currently served through special education is likely to result in increased referrals to special education by parents and teachers. This would result in a huge step backward in which many resources would be devoted to unnecessary paperwork, meetings and evaluations. For example, evaluating just half of the students who could be eligible for special education in the next two years would cost over three million dollars. That three million dollars would certainly be better spent to fuel change and provide support to these students and many others.

4. Training has proven to be a critical ingredient in the success of Act 230. This year, the provision of Act 230 that sets aside training funds will sunset. Our training needs have only begun to be met, and it is critical that this resource remains available.

5. Many interviewees spoke to the incredible levels of commitment and energy that their staff members are devoting to meeting the needs of all students. This effort requires extra time for meeting with others, planning and developing new curriculum, participating in shared decision-making processes, and reaching out to the community. Schools in which Act 230 is fully embraced appear to be bursting with energy, but there is a recognition that time and energy are resources with limits.

Future Directions/Needs

Financial resources

- Continued community support of local budgets
- Increased amounts of dependable and equitable financial support through state and federal funding
- Protection in the coming reauthorization of IDEA for states that demonstrate successful alternatives to categorical service delivery models
- Continued and new searches for external funding
- Commitment to small class sizes
- Continued exploration of ways to maximize existing resources, including using resources more flexibly

Human resources

- Continued federal, state, and local support for the staff positions needed to support students in general classrooms
- More flexible use of people's time
- Reorganization of classrooms and teaching teams, for the purpose of distributing staff in the best and most efficient ways

Time

- More planning time
- More flexibility and/or reorganizations of teacher schedules to allow for common planning time

CHALLENGE # 2:
BUILD THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS

Concerns: A wide range of professional development and training activities is essential to the success of efforts to support the diverse needs of students. Schools with a long history of supporting all students recognize that comprehensive and cohesive training opportunities help to build an expertise within the school that allow it to increase its capacity for dealing with a variety of student and teacher needs. There is a concern that future opportunities for training will be limited, in part because the Act 230 funds which have been allocated for training are scheduled to sunset this year. Future training efforts need to address the following issues:

1. ISTs need increased opportunities for training so that they have the capacity to provide support to teachers and students.

2. Classroom teachers have expressed the need for training to increase their abilities to deal with students' diverse academic, social, behavioral, and emotional needs.

3. Paraeducators have a need for increased training opportunities related to dealing with the diverse academic and behavioral needs of students.

4. Training in early intervention strategies is needed for preschool teachers.

5. Preservice training opportunities need to be expanded to provide new teachers with increased skills in meeting students' diverse needs.

6. Training efforts among professionals and paraeducators need to be linked so that they are consistent with one another and with school wide goals.

Future Directions/Needs

- Increased opportunities for training and professional development for all staff members
- Continued state level support for training activities
- More purposeful planning with regards to the types of training being offered and how training activities related to one another
- Training opportunities in specific areas of need as identified by individual schools

CHALLENGE # 3:
MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Concerns: Social service agencies, mental health agencies and school districts all report a significant increase in the number of students with serious emotional and behavioral challenges. The families of these students are also in need of support. A lack of support to meet the needs of these students and their families was cited as one of the chief reasons for unsuccessful referrals to ISTs. Potential strategies for addressing these issues include the following:

1. The State Board's BEST initiative is committed to building school and community capacity to deal effectively with students with challenging behavior. Resources for training and technical assistance are needed to implement BEST local plans.

2. An integrated system of education and family services also needs to be developed. To accomplish this, communities will need to engage in planning around the many joint initiatives of the Agency of Human Service and the Department of Education.

3. Continued training is needed for teachers and paraeducators serving students with emotional and behavioral needs.

4. Low class size has been cited as being critical to the success of students with challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Future Directions/Needs

- Resources for training and technical assistance to implement BEST plans
- Development of an integrated system of education and family services
- More training for teachers around the issue of supporting children with emotional and behavioral needs
- Continued support for small class size and student/staff ratios

CHALLENGE # 4:
FORGE CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

Concerns: Although a number of schools are devoting a great deal of time and energy to forging strong links with their communities, others cite this as an area for further growth. Suggestions for improving connections to the community include the following:

1. Teachers and service providers need to collaborate to develop and implement supports for individual students with a variety of academic, behavioral and family living needs.

2. Schools and community agencies need to join forces to respond to school and community initiatives (e.g., Family Preservation, Success by Six).

3. Schools need to expand their efforts to involve parents and other community members in school wide activities and decision-making processes.

Future Directions/Needs

- Strengthen the IEP and IST processes to build strong partnerships between parents, teachers, and administrators
- Increase efforts between and among schools and community agencies to support individual student needs and address community and systemic issues
- Extend current efforts to build community support for schools
- Involve community members in all aspects of school life, including identifying the content of the curriculum, bringing the curriculum to the community, and developing school mission statements

"We want a community where every member of the community feels significantly worthwhile. We want a school where every student feels significantly worthwhile. The test of our success is whether or not we're doing that."

Administrator

"I hope in the future that it doesn't come to the point of dollars and cents making the decision on what's right for kids."

Parent

"As a parent I guess I want what every other Mom wants. I just want my son to reach his potential and be happy and be able to give something back to the world.... I guess I want that for all kids."

Parent

Additional Resources

1. **Vermont's Act 230 and Special Education Funding and Cost Study, January, 1995**
   This report identifies the reasons for increasing costs in special education and recommendations for next steps.

2. **Vermont's Act 230 and Special Education Reform: A Primer, Fall, 1994**
   This document summarizes the problems that led to the passage of Vermont's Act 230 in 1990. It briefly outlines what Act 230 was designed to do, the results so far and proposed next steps to ensure continued progress.

3. **Changing Times: Act 230 in Action, May, 1994**
   This newsletter includes a Special Feature section: "Students with Challenging Behaviors: Resources and Initiatives." In addition, there is a summary of the new special education process to be adopted by all schools by July, 1995 and an article to help separate fact from fiction when it comes to what Act 230 mandates.

4. **Changing Times: Act 230 in Action, Spring, 1994**
   This newsletter presents articles highlighting successful practices in special education reform from six different schools around Vermont. In addition, it summarizes the findings of the Act 230 Evaluation to date, lists new initiatives from the Department of Education and the Agency of Human Services designed to meet current challenges, and highlights from a keynote address by United States Assistant Secretary of Education Judy Heumann when she visited Vermont.

5. **Vermont's Act 230 Three Years Later: A Report on the Impact of Act 230, December, 1993**
   This report summarizes the findings of the first year of the Act 230 evaluation project. This study looked at the impact of Act 230 on schools and on the performance of students who have been exited from special education services.

6. **Changing Times: Act 230 in Action, Spring, 1992**
   This newsletter outlines changes that schools have made, practitioner's and parent's perspectives, an article discussing where the gifted fit in with Act 230 and an article outlining some strategies ISTs can use for students with reading problems.

7. **Developing Instructional Support Teams–Video Guide, Fall, 1991**

   The video is 36 minutes long and reviews decisions that a number of schools have made in developing their Instructional Support Teams. The video starts with an introduction explaining the context of Instructional Support Teams within Act 230 and the intent of the video. The remainder of the video focuses on the details of how teams operate.

8. **Act 230: Regulation or Revolution? Spring, 1991**

   This newsletter, which came out shortly after Act 230 was passed, summarizes what Act 230 requires and features perspectives from practitioners and parents as well.

9. **Responding to the Demands of Diversity–Act 230: An Introductory Video, Spring, 1991**

   This video is approximately 20 minutes long and is meant to be an introduction to the development of Act 230 and the provisions of the Act. The video focuses on the context in which Act 230 was developed and the concepts on which it was built.

These publications can be obtained by contacting:
The Vermont Department of Education,
120 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05620-2501
(802) 828-3141